

Thomas Jefferson Esq
Charlottesville

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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HON. ALLEN G. THURMAN

BEFORE THE

LITERARY SOCIETIES,

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA,

AT

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.,

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26th. 1872.

— — —

WASHINGTON
H. C. KINHORN & CO. PRINTERS
1872

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26th, 1872.

WASHINGTON:

H. POLKINHORN & CO., PRINTERS.
1872.

UNIVERSITY OF VA.,

June 28th, 1872.

HON. A. G. THURMAN,

SIR:—In behalf of the Literary Societies of the University of Virginia, we would request for publication a copy of the Address delivered by you on the evening of the 26th inst.

With the highest appreciation of its excellencies,

We are, sir,

Your most obedient servants,

Chairmen. $\begin{cases} J. G. TAYLOR, \\ T. A. SEDDON. \end{cases}$

— to: —

CHARLOTTESVILLE, *June 28th, 1872.*

GENTLEMEN:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your polite note, and to send herewith a copy of the Address.

I am very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

A. G. THURMAN.

Messrs. J. G. TAYLOR and T. A. SEDDON,

Chairmen.

A D D R E S S.

The theme upon which I propose to offer some observations to-night, is the future of our country, or, rather, the dangers likely to menace the existence of the Republic, and the means of averting them.

In the outset, I assume, what I believe to be true, that whatever differences of opinion have existed, or may yet exist, as to the advantages or disadvantages of preserving the Union, every American citizen now wishes it to be preserved, if at the same time liberty can be secured and the rights and interests of every section promoted. The proposition that freedom has no safe dwelling place, save in small communities, is an old idea, and, whether true or false, I have no quarrel with him who sincerely believes it. Nay, more, were the sad alternative forced upon us, to choose between a splendid despotism, ruling over a vast territory, and an oppressed people, on the one hand, and on the other, freedom in a small state and an humble community, no true man should hesitate to choose the latter. For freedom is of such transcendent value that it far outweighs all the distinction, pomp and power, that the most successful despotism can ever achieve. But the experiment has to be made, whether a vast Republic may not co-exist with freedom, and with advantage to all its parts: and every one of us, I am sure, whatever may be his forebodings, is anxious to give the experiment a fair trial. Therefore it is that I speak upon this theme to-night. I know of none more appropriate for an address to an assemblage of American youth. The mature men of to-day will ere long be gone. Whatever of good or of evil

government may confer or inflict, will soon cease to trouble them. Their mantles will fall upon your shoulders and the shoulders of those, who like you, are just entering upon manhood, and upon you and your fellows, will rest the grave responsibility of contributing to the happiness or the misery, not of one only, but perhaps of many generations. Wisely to prepare for that responsibility is a task than which none can be nobler, none more elevating, none that better deserves to engage the understanding or warm the heart.

The first danger to the duration of the Republic, of which I shall speak, is that likely to result from its magnitude. It is a trite observation that nations, like men, have their infancy, youth, manhood, old age, decay, and dissolution. Whether this analogy be fanciful or not, the history of the world gives no small support to the idea, that nature has set a limit to the growth and duration of empire. The fate of Babylon, Nineveh, Assyria, Media, Egypt, of the Empires of Alexander, the Cæsars, Genghis, Tamerlane, the Caliphs, Charlemagne, and Charles the Fifth, cannot, while it strikes our imagination, fail to arrest our attention. We pause and ask: “Is it ever thus to be?” But let us not be too hasty in our conclusions. True, those great monarchies have been rent into pieces; true, the seats of some of them are now given up to desolation; but it does not follow that a similar fate awaits us. They were, for the most part, the product of conquest, and over their wide domains despotism held unlimited sway. Their fate teaches how insecure is the empire whose sole foundation is violence, and how powerless is tyranny to perpetuate its rule over an unwilling people. But it does not teach—at least it does not prove—that a homogeneous people, under free institutions, may not attain and preserve a greatness that none of those States ever knew. To our country it was reserved to make this mighty experiment, than which

nothing grander has ever engaged the sympathies or the efforts of man. Let us not, with despondent souls, rashly predict its failure—but, rather, with hopeful hearts and patriotic zeal, let us manfully strive for its successful accomplishment. That our Republic, if it hold together, will attain an unexampled and perilous greatness is certainly true. Only fifty years hence our population will probably exceed 160,000,000, or four times the present population of France. At the end of a century, in 1972, if it increase in the same ratio that has hitherto marked its growth, the United States will contain more than twice as many people as now inhabit the continent of Europe. If it be inadmissible to suppose that this ratio of increase will continue, it is not irrational to affirm, that within the lifetime of a child now born, our population will equal that of the five great Powers of Europe combined. Such an aggregation of mankind, for the most part homogeneous, belonging to the most intellectual and energetic portion of the human race, speaking the same language, all more or less educated, occupying one of the fairest and most fruitful portions of the earth in that North Temperate Zone that seems to be the chosen habitation of civilization and progress, united under one government, and that a government of free institutions, will present a phenomenon such as never yet has been seen in the world. History exhibits nothing like it, nothing that bears any close analogy to it. It strikes the imagination like the dawn of a millennium, and even the most sanguine and hopeful can scarcely regard it as more than a dream. But, who is there wise enough to foresee that it will not be reality? Who is there bold enough to say that the Providence that creates will not preserve? Who is there authorized to condemn as blind and unreasoning optimism, the hope that the experiment may be crowned with success?

It is true that a contrariety of interests is incident to so great and varied a territory. With but one interruption,

the Republic extends from beyond the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the confines of the Torrid Zone, and from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Pacific on the west. In square miles its area nearly equals that of all Europe. It contains every variety of soil, from the most fertile plains to barren mountains and desert wastes. It holds in its bosom every earth and mineral useful to mankind. Its water boundary, with the indentations, exceeds 14,000 miles. It thus presents a field for every industry known to man. Agriculture, commerce, manufactures, mining—every pursuit in short that serves to sustain or enrich a people are here seen in a state of unwonted and growing activity. That there must be some clashing of interests between the different sections of such a country, is obviously true. That each section, in maintaining the Union, must make some sacrifice of its peculiar interests, is almost as obvious. But the question to be answered is, not whether such sacrifices are made, but whether they are not compensated by the advantages resulting from the Union. In my judgment, they are far more than compensated. A particular section may be oppressed for a time by unjust laws—as some have been, and I think yet are—but in the long run justice is pretty sure to prevail. In the meantime, the incalculable benefits of the Union—free trade between all its parts, unrestricted communication, highways that penetrate the most remote recesses, exemption from foreign aggression, and peace at home—amply repay all the local sacrifices that occur. It is no answer to this to say that peace has not always prevailed, that we have just emerged from the most fearful civil war the world ever saw. True it is so, but for seventy-three years domestic peace did prevail. For seventy-three years no man lost his life in civil commotion, no man was executed for a political offence. The history of no other nation records a similar experience. Not one! No, not one! “To insure domestic tranquillity,” is declared

in the preamble to the Constitution, to be one of the objects for which it is ordained. It did insure it for nearly three-quarters of a century, and if, at last, we fell upon evil times, the exception only illustrates the generality of the rule.

The diversity of races and languages among us is considered by some to be fraught with danger to the duration of the Republic. American, Goth, Celt, Anglo-Saxon, Teuton, Latin, African, all contribute to form our population. But I apprehend that the danger supposed to arise from this diversity, is greatly exaggerated. Of the thirty-eight and a-half millions of our people in 1870, but five and a-half millions were foreign born, and they were scattered throughout every State and Territory of the Union. And for the most part they are intelligent, industrious, thriving, and sincerely attached to free institutions. With the increase of population, the proportion of foreign born to native citizens will decrease each year. The various elements of white population will become more and more blended, until a homogeneous whole will be the result. The American of a century hence may differ from the American of the past or the present century, but yet, whatever his origin, he will be an American. What people are more homogeneous than the French? And yet, in their veins runs the blood of Celt, Roman, Goth, Teuton, to say nothing of lesser subdivisions of the human race. What more composite in his origin than an Englishman, to whose blood the Celt, the Roman, the Dane, the Angle, the Saxon, the Norman all contributed? Yet, what unification more complete than that of the English people of to-day? We have nothing then to fear, as it seems to me, from the diversity of race among our white population. They will, before many generations shall have passed away, be merged into one common type, the American of the future, with the same language, the same literature, the

same sentiments, and substantially the same characteristics.

The African presents a more difficult problem. By some it is supposed, that, following an instinct of his nature, the negro will, eventually, drift into a more congenial clime for him—the Tropics. But a century, nay many centuries, may elapse before this will occur, should it ever occur. The climate of the Southern States is not unfriendly to the African, as his rapid increase there for nearly two hundred years attests. His exodus, unless precipitated by a war of races, which humanity and the interest of both white and black forbid, must necessarily be slow. Practically then, it may be assumed that he is to remain a citizen of the Republic. And the question is: will his continued existence among us endanger its duration? As long as he was a slave, he was a bone of contention between the abolitionist, seeking to set him free at whatever cost, and the Southerner, insisting upon the guarantees of the Constitution. Then, indeed, he did endanger the Republic. But, though he is to some extent a bone of contention yet, I do not see that he is longer a source of peril. His race now constitutes less than thirteen per cent of our population. With each returning census, although the absolute number of the race may be greater, the proportion will be found to be less. Its numerical strength may increase, but its relative strength will constantly diminish. As a cause of strife among the whites, as a facile instrument in the hands of designing and unscrupulous men, the negro is certainly a disturbing element, but great as are these evils, they are not beyond the rectifying power of time, prudence, and patience.

Another cause of anxiety is found in the proneness of mankind to war and their love of military glory. It was a celebrated English philosopher who said, that war is the natural condition of the human race. It is to be

hoped for the credit of the race, that the saying is untrue. But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that two or three hundred or more millions of people—the future population of the United States if they hold together—have never yet maintained perpetual peace. So inclined are men to war, so intoxicating is military glory, so great are the honors and emoluments awarded to successful chieftains, that peace, perpetual peace, over a continent, seems more like the dream of a visionary, than the well founded hope of common sense. In the four hundred and fifty odd years of the Roman Republic, the temple of Janus was shut but once. In no year since history was written, has peace prevailed over the entire globe. Even in this nineteenth century, which we are accustomed to call enlightened, there is scarcely a great Power in Europe that has for twenty consecutive years been exempt from war. In view of these facts, it may well be asked, where, if the Republic be perpetuated, will be the outlet for the warlike spirit of as warlike a people as ever existed? Will it find occupation in war upon our neighbors? Where are the neighbors who could long resist? Will it make battle with the Powers of Asia or of Europe? The soldier would gather few laurels in a war necessarily waged upon the deep. Where then but in civil strife could the warlike temper be displayed and military honors be won? And could the Republic long bear the strain of such strife? I can only answer that nations have survived the most dreadful and sanguinary civil wars. Not to multiply instances, witness France, Austria, England, Spain. It may be unwise to expect that we shall escape the calamities that have befallen other peoples, but it is not, I trust, unreasonable to believe, or at least to hope, that we may be able to survive them.

It is not uncommon to hear the remark, that the passions and prejudices excited by the late civil war will long endure, and cannot fail to imperil the Union.

This is not the time or the place to discuss that war. Indeed many years must elapse before impartial and philosophic history will do exact justice to the actors in that mighty scene. But this much may now be safely affirmed, that if the North believed, as it did, that right was on its side in suppressing what it regarded as a rebellion, the South had equal confidence in the justice of her cause. For four long and weary years, against the most fearful odds, and in the midst of privation and suffering that might have appalled the stoutest heart, her people upheld that cause with a heroism and fortitude never surpassed. To doubt their sincerity in the face of this fact, is simply to shut one's eyes to the truth—to heap unmerited reproaches upon them, is to disregard the plainest maxims of wisdom, charity and justice. It is doubtless true that the great features of the struggle will never be forgotten. The influence of a contest that placed America in the front rank of the warlike nations of the earth; that developed characters, whose names can never pass into oblivion; that made many a battle field heroic ground to be reverentially trodden by the feet of pilgrims from age to age: cannot be effaced in a day. But, unless all history teaches a lesson that is false, the bitterness of feeling engendered by the strife will pass away and cease to shape the conduct of men. What nation has ever suffered more from civil wars than France, but what Frenchman now speaks of them save as events of history? What Englishman inquires, unless from the instinct of a harmless curiosity, whether his neighbor's ancestors wore the red rose of Lancaster or the white rose of York, or whether at a later day they were roundheads under Cromwell or cavaliers under Charles? When were the passions of men ever more excited than in the civil wars of Rome, that followed the passage of the Rubicon and ended only when the victory at Actium placed the imperial diadem upon the brow of Octavius? Yet more than three centuries elapsed

before the Empire was divided, and it was not until nearly eleven centuries more had rolled around, that Mahomet, the second, placed the Crescent above the Cross on the dome of Sophia and put an end forever to the Empire of the East.

But why dwell upon particulars, when every nation that exists or has ever existed, presents an example of the forgiveness or forgetfulness of injuries given and received. A wise Providence has ordained that hate shall not “reign eternal in the human breast.” The violent passions of our nature may dominate for a time, but the strain is too great to last, and in the end the better and gentler emotions prevail. Every revolving year, though it may not blot out the memories of the past, will soften their asperities, and the time may come, more speedily than the most sanguine now hope, when a fraternal feeling will animate the breasts of all who find shelter and protection under the *ægis* of the Republic.

I come, lastly, to consider what, in my judgment, is a greater peril than any of which I have spoken, the tendency towards centralization. In treating this subject, I must necessarily express some political views, for they are inherent in it, but I shall not violate the proprieties of the occasion by speaking as a partisan, and I trust, that I shall avoid wounding the most delicate sensibility. If, as I have supposed, the theme that I have chosen is a proper one, it cannot be improper to express calmly, impartially, and without party bias, feeling or purpose, the thoughts to which it gives rise—thoughts, indeed, that are inseparable from its consideration.

The tendency towards centralization is by no means confined to the United States. It stands revealed in the consolidation of Italy, the unification of Germany, and the union of the British Provinces under the Dominion of Canada, as well as with us. There may be

hidden causes of this tendency, that it is difficult to discover, but there are other causes too patent to escape observation, or at least agencies that work without ceasing in a centralizing direction. Every ship that is launched, every railroad that is built, every telegraph wire that is stretched, is an agency of this kind. The ship owner looks to the Federal Government, clothed with the power "to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States," for the protection and encouragement his interest requires, and naturally wishes that Government to be powerful enough to grant him all he asks. The Railroad Company, spurning the limits of a State, projects its road through many States, and submits, with ill concealed discontent, to the vexations of local law. The road itself, almost annihilating time and space by the rapidity of transit, brings the most remote regions into close communication, until the mind finds itself losing the idea of State lines and thinking only of the wide-spreading Republic. And so, in a still more eminent degree, with the telegraph.

But these are not the only agents of consolidation. One of the most powerful, if I am not mistaken, is what may be styled metropolitan literature and the metropolitan press. It has been said that orators govern Republics, but if the remark were ever true, it is true no longer. Had every member of Congress the eloquence of Demosthenes, they could not mould public sentiment against a press whose daily issues exceed 1,300,000, and furnish daily mental food to millions of readers. But of these 1,300,000 daily sheets, about 1,170,000, or nearly eight ninths of the whole number, are published in the three cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. More than one half of the whole number issue from the press of New York alone.

If we turn from the dailies, to the weeklies, tri and semi-weeklies, reviews, and magazines, we find the same

striking fact, that these three cities are the great centres of publication. There is scarcely an art or industry that has not its organ in the city of New York. So too of the books published in the United States. More than three-fourths—probably nearer nine-tenths—issue from the press of these three cities. The effect is that they have become the great centres from which the facts, the fictions and the opinions that are moulding the American mind, emanate. But local self-government requires vigorous and independent thought on the part of those who uphold it. It is a plant that does not flourish in the atmosphere of monopoly whether of business or of ideas. The centralization of power that has distinguished for centuries every government of France, whatever its form, has been owing in a great degree, it is thought, to the centralizing influence of Paris. And so, I am inclined to think, the tendency of the facts I have stated, has been and is to strengthen the idea of consolidation among our people. Look into many of the school books and see what political doctrines are taught to our children—doctrines that twenty years ago no party would have ventured to assert. See how in newspaper and periodical, in law book and volumes called historical, the powers of the federal government are exalted to a height beyond the imagination of the warmest advocate of a strong government when the Constitution was formed. In brief, see how literature in all its departments, influenced by the materialistic tendencies of the age, or seduced by the glowing image of a gorgeous and imperial republic, lends its potent aid to the work of centralization. And remembering that this literature comes from a section of the country in which centralization has ever found its most able and efficient supporters, I think that I do not err in attributing to this cause all the weight that I attach to it.

Another striking fact may have some connection with

the subject under discussion. I refer to the much more rapid rate of increase in the last seventy years, and throughout all Christendom, of the urban than of the rural population. The population of England in 1871 was nearly two and a-half times as great as it was in 1801. But, in the same period, the population of London had grown from 876,000 to 3,883,000; of Liverpool from, 77,600 to 493,000; of Manchester, from 70,000 to 355,000. From 1800 to 1866 the increase of population in France was about thirty-three per cent. But in the same time the population of Paris was nearly trebled. Berlin, which, in 1816, contained but 182,000 inhabitants, now contains over 700,000. St. Petersburg has six times the population that it had a century ago. Madrid contains two and a-half times as many people as it did in 1845. And these are but illustrations. Throughout all Europe the population of the cities and towns has increased far more rapidly than that of the country. The same thing is true of America. The last census shows that in some of the States there was within the last decade no increase at all of the rural population, or one too insignificant to be noticed. The whole increase was in the cities and towns. And with the exception of some of the new States, the same census shows everywhere in the Republic, an increase in the cities and towns altogether disproportionate to that outside of them. What will be the ultimate effect of this fact, if prolonged, upon our institutions, I do not venture to predict. I merely note it as a fact very striking in itself, and worthy of the profoundest consideration.

I have thus, in a very imperfect manner, I am aware, brought to your attention some of the causes, or at least agencies, that are at work tending to create a supreme centralized government over the Republic. To these is to be added the inevitable effect of the late Civil War, in which the government assumed powers by

all admitted to be extraordinary, and to the exercise of which the people became habituated.

Of course it will be understood that in enumerating among these causes, commerce, railroads, telegraphs, literature, and the press, I manifest no hostile disposition towards them or any or either of them. There is no one so absurd as to be their enemy. But the best of earthly things may have evil as well as good tendencies, and it is but common prudence while we accept and enjoy the good, to seek to avert the evil.

That with tremendous power all these causes have operated and yet continue to operate, might easily be shown by our history for the last ten years, and especially by a review of the Constitutional amendments and the legislation of Congress. But I forbear to enter upon that field, lest it might be deemed inappropriate to the occasion. I will only venture the single remark, that the interpretation placed by some commentators upon the first section of the 14th article of the amendments, makes the jurisdiction of Congress supreme over all State legislation in everything that concerns life, liberty, property or the equal protection of the laws, in short in almost everything that is the subject of law. If this is the true interpretation, consolidation already exists.

It remains to be considered, whether the concentration of all power in the hands of the Federal Government, would be likely to preserve or imperil the existence of the Republic. To my mind, nothing in the future seems more certain than that it would not only imperil, but ultimately destroy it. I do not believe it possible that it could long endure under such a system. Whatever name might be given to it—Republic, Monarchy, Empire, or Federation—its true name would be despotism. There never was a greater mistake than to suppose, that a government of despotic powers is alone able to govern

a great extent of territory. The very reverse of the proposition is nearer the truth. The very magnitude of a country, diversified in its interests and in the habits, usages, customs and traditions of its people, makes local self-governments an indispensable necessity. Without our system of States, the Federal Government would never have existed: without them, it could never have extended from ocean to ocean; without them a happy, contented, free, and prosperous people would never have been our boast. And whenever they shall cease to exist or shall become but a name, the foundations of the Republic will have crumbled away and the structure they supported will hasten to its fall. I cannot repress a feeling of amazement when I see men, whose ability and patriotism I cannot deny, straining every nerve to extend the jurisdiction of the Congress over matters of the merest local concern in the States, as if it could possibly be either right or politic for the purely local law of a State to be made by the representatives of other States. And I cannot but marvel at the blindness that does not perceive, that a Congress with such powers would soon become the most corrupt body on earth, and fall to pieces from that corruption.

But it is time to bring this discourse to a close. I have endeavored to point out some of the dangers that menace the duration of the Republic, and to weigh their importance as I went along. How they are to be averted it would be presumptuous in me to predict. To time and experience must be left the task of providing remedies for whatever evils may be found to exist. Our forefathers, in framing the Constitution, wisely provided for its amendment. They knew that no work of human hands is perfect: they knew that what is sufficient for the wants of one generation, may, from changed circumstances, be inadequate to the wants of another. They founded a government more perfect than the world had

ever known. They ordained it not for themselves only, but for their posterity also. To those who should come after them, they left the task of making such alterations as experience should prove to be necessary or wisdom commend. Herein consists the prime element of safety as long as the government shall endure. That the Constitution will be further amended there can be no doubt. If it shall happen in your day, see to it that the rights of the States and the liberties of the people be preserved. In the meantime, cultivate your own literature, maintain your own institutions of learning, sustain your own press: in a word, "do your own thinking."

Young gentlemen, within the peaceful precincts of this University, inseparably associated with the immortal name of Jefferson, in the bosom of a Commonwealth whose fame will endure as long as genius has a worshipper, freedom a disciple, or heroism an admirer, you have received your preparatory training for the great trials of life. It is no pathway of ease that you are soon to tread, but it may prove a highway of honor, if you tread it well.

Without rash and overweening confidence, but with brave hearts and steadfast minds, you should enter upon it. Let no vain repining over the past: no morbid disgust with the present: no unmanly fear of the future: unnerve your minds or palsy your efforts. Go forth, resolved to contribute by your talents, your education, your industry, your energy, to the welfare and glory of your native land. Let this be your earnest and unvarying rule of action, and whether fortune shall grant or withhold honors and wealth, you will have in your dying hours, what you will then prize more than honors and wealth, the inward consciousness of a well-spent life.





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